DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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1980-81 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS SET

The final waterfowl hunting season frameworks established for 1980-81 by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are generally the same as last year.

Nationwide

--Stabilizing duck season frameworks and limits at 1979-80 levels. Regulations have been generally unchanged in several regions of the U.S. in recent years as part of an effort to better understand how hunting regulations affect duck harvests and populations. The effort will be expanded to encompass all four flyways this fall. Plans call for most season length and bag limits for ducks to remain at 1979-80 levels for 5 years, during which time the United States will join Canada in studies of the relationships among hunting regulations duck harvests, and duck populations. By stabilizing the major duck hunting regulations, waterfowl researchers and managers will be better able to evaluate the effects of factors such as habitat conditions, production, disease, and natural mortality upon harvests and the population dynamics of ducks.

Recent studies by the Fish and Wildlife Service indicate that stabilizing the regulations will have no significant effect on duck populations. The experiment could be terminated quickly, however, if population levels indicate a need for more restrictive regulations. An environmental assessment describing the stabilized regulations plan is now available.

Key aspects of the frameworks, including minor changes from last year, follow:

Atlantic Flyway

- --Zoning in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. These States are offered the option to select waterfowl seasons by geographical areas.
- --Redheads. The daily bag limit under conventional regulations is being increased from 1 daily and 1 in possession to 2 daily and 4 in possession with no area closure restrictions. In those areas of the flyway open to canvasback harvest the daily bag limit on redheads under conventional regulations is 2, or 1 redhead and 1 canvasback.

Mississippi Flyway

--Changes in duck and goose limits. Bag and possession limits for Canada and white-fronted geese are now separated, and with a few exceptions, possession limits for all waterfowl will be twice the daily bag limit. Redheads will not be

included in area closures this year, and limits will be separate from those for canvasbacks in the conventional bag limit option.

- --Zoning. New 3-year zoning experiments, with changes in zoning arrangements, will begin this year in Missouri, Illinois, and Michigan. Zone boundaries in Alabama, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, and Tennessee are unchanged.
- --Canada geese. A number of regulatory changes were made in conjunction with ongoing management programs and plans. These include reductions in harvest quotas in Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Illinois; removal of the quota in Kentucky; special regulatory provisions for a portion of Michigan to help solve nuisance problems caused by local giant Canada geese; reopening the Canada goose hunting season in a portion of Mississippi to provide opportunity to harvest giant Canadas; minor adjustments in season lengths in Missouri and Illinois; and reduced limits and provisions for a shorter season in portions of Wisconsin if population levels fail to reach designated peak numbers.

Central Flyway

- --Redhead and canvasback bag limits. Daily bag limits under conventional regulations will permit taking I redhead and I canvasback (except in closed areas).
- --Separate limits for dark and light geese. Daily bag and possession limits for dark (Canada and white-fronted) geese will be separated from those for light (snow, blue, and Ross') geese in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and eastern Texas.
- --Increased possession limits of geese. Hunters will be allowed to have in their possession the number of geese which they can legally take during two days. Possession limits double daily bag limits are traditional for most ducks and many other game birds.
- --Removal of terminal dates for hunting certain geese. Seasons for hunting Canada and white-fronted geese will no longer be terminated early on specific dates in the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas. This will permit greater flexibility in managing several populations which frequent these States.

Pacific Flyway

- --Merganser limits. Mergansers are now included within the basic limit of 7 ducks a day and 14 in possession. The restrictive limit on hooded mergansers has been removed. Both changes were made in an effort to simplify regulations.
- --Restrictive goose regulations in portions of California, Oregon, and Washington. Various restrictive regulations on goose hunting continue in the Balance-of-the-State and Northeastern Zones of California; in Lake and Klamath Counties of Oregon; and in Island, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom Counties of Washington. These restrictions are designed to rebuild populations of white-fronted, cackling Canada and Wrangel Island snow geese. California is offered two additional options for season selection, and limits on snow geese in Washington may be increased to 3 birds.

The Service's final frameworks for migratory waterfowl hunting were published in the September 4 Federal Register. State conservation agency authorities select their seasons and other options from those offered in the final Federal frameworks. Final late season regulations will be published in the Federal Register in late September.